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ACHINERY

MACKNIGHT BLACK

M A C H I N E R Y

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M A C H I N E R Y

MACKNIGHT BLACK

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Horace Liveright

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TO
My Mother

231824

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I.
M A C H I N E R Y

CORLISS ENGINE AT REST

This is the world's end, and the world's beginning.
This is the stillness, the motionless perfection,
That awaited the burning of the first star,
That will take back to its peace the charred sun.
This is the quietness our blood remembers, and
 flows toward again;
This is the moment after strength,
Before fullness; and Time, the white tree
Whose roots have buckled the fields of space,
Is a seed now, and lies cool in the sky, unflowering.

RECIPROCATING ENGINES

How softly, as the great wings of eagles flow
through a sky,
These tons of shaped steel
Ply through motionless air, how strongly they
mesh
The stillness with a peace of their own.
The birth of a star is like this, the birth of a
star
Is a blooming from quietness; wheel-flight and
star-flight
Are one peace of clear motion.
The bodies of men and of women, of lovers,
Stirring with atoms, perfect in breast and limb,
Are like steel-flight; they are softly in being,
As blossoms are white on a pear tree in April;
Springing from stillness, they have their peace.

CORLISS ENGINE

The hours, in a long plunge,
Swirl unconquering
Against this motion clear in steel.
Body of an older birth, like rock
That stands against a sea, this motion breaks
Time's lesser flow. And here is raised
A symbol of the flight in emptiness
That bears the world and our own selves;
Before such clarity the days fall back; the very
days
That drown our lives at last, fall spent
Before the deeper might that builds our blood.

FLY-WHEEL

The steel repeats,
The steel repeats itself;
The wheel-arc's flight,
The curving journey,
Has my heart's
Persistency.
The same, the clear
Perfection follows close
Upon perfection:
Pulse and swirl,
And stillness broken;
Waves of steel and thrusts of blood,
Like generations on the earth,
Sons and fathers, fathers, sons;
Peace of motion, like a seed
That comes to seed again.

MACHINERY

Slow, salt machinery
Of oceans laboring on blackened reefs
Is not more constant than the racing steel
Of engines leaping to their thrusts;
In neither is there sign
Of power's beginning or its end.
Here wheels, like breakers, pile
And pound on stillness; polished tons
Of matter beat the shaken air.
This flood, like floods of water, hurls
A mindless rhythm through the mind;
It chants of wholeness unremembered,
Ancient as bloodless toil.

TURBINES

Look, these are all
We have for symbols;
And these are bare
Of thought and pain and hope,
Yet heavy with another bloom
Like trees of paradise;
For they lay hold
On soil of time and space
Unwatered by our dream;
And they are near
To motion that fore-ran
Our flesh; and they are solitary, strong;
And from the steel, how splendidly
They lift their buds
Of doom transcended and complete.

POWER-HOUSE

Here, as where the measured sun
Hammers the cold earth with Springs unending,
A piston beats immobile steel
To flight as fertile as awakened lands.
This covered place is splendid as a sky,
This pounded wheel blooms like the earth;
Whoever stands here must be moved
Deep in his blood, as when he stands
And stares across live April fields
Beneath the steady lightning of the sun.

BESIDE A BALANCE-WHEEL

I watch the great spokes of this wheel
Club stillness with a might that churned the new
stars,
And find the same labor under my breast;
I see the strokes fall and swirl away, soundless,
impalpable,
On the wings of clean motion that father my
pride.
This I shall remember when darkness comes to
drown me at last;
I shall remember a rhythm deeper than blood; I
shall hope
To enter the earth like a blow, and sweep clear
in a flight.

MACHINE MOMENT

Think, and this bare
Wheel-flight will drift away
Like a petal.
Speak, and this hard splendor
Will vanish whole like a frost-flower.
Only watch; let this clear thing
Drain your breast;
Share this blooming.

TIDE

I am thinking of valleys, and of the sun,
And of the mouths of girls,
And of corn yellow on the ground in November.
A moment ago I was alone
Before the clean presence of wheels toiling,
Before the bare motion of the universe
In their geometric flood.
And now I am holding in my mind
Remembered things
That are like stones a sea has washed over
And made strange,
Clearer from having a tide
Free them of all but themselves.

THE THING LIKE JOY

Whatever there is that motion gives to a wheel,
Whatever a turbine has
Within itself, when the power leaps,
Is more bare than joy
And clearer than peace.
About the roots
Of the bright unsure blooming of my mind
Wholeness like this is unfailing as loam.
Somewhere within my blood
Is the fore-strength of peace
That the sun has in its burning;
Within my breast hangs the thing like joy
That a gold pear is
When the seed's drive comes full on the bough.

ENGINE-ROOM

In the bare presence of motion
Time is no more than gull-flight over a sea,
No more than a slow wing, a lonely flying.
The sea beats, the sea thrashes, and lifts skyward;
The sea spends and gathers itself; and a gull flies
over.

Motion not in floods but living in steel,
Churns here on the stillness; strength in the wheel
and rod
Swirls again and again, and repeats its thrust.
Before the slow beat of Time's wing, this power
has labored;
After the surge-haunting flight is gone over, this
strength will endure.

NEW MOTHER

Dynamics are bosoms,
Round with the sweet first-filling of a new
mother's milk.
The lowlands have fostered enough of sons,
and the hills, and the sea.
Now a strange mother with nipples of iron
gives suck to a nation.
At her side the young towns take strength
on their lips.

231834

BRIGHT MACHINE

Magnified and shaped in steel, here is final
Energy, the seed that fertilizes space,
The motion locked in atoms, weaving clear
 designs
Of star and mountain, flesh and sea.
Who finds this bloodless splendor, and who
 lays
His warm dreams down, and in his heart
Gives up his hope of lonely permanence——
He comes to fullness and a peace
That runs beneath his blood; he holds the
 turning key
To doorways of the earth and sky; he comes
As loam between the furrows of the field he
 plows, as light
Between the sunset and his lifted eyes.

IN THIS AGE

Thought as clean as the soil's unthinking labor,
As sure, as far-off from fear and hope,
Has yielded a fruit that is strong with the being
Of earth in the earthy consciousness of men.
Turbine and dynamo, locomotive and skyward
tower——

This harvest is come, like any other,
Beautiful and bare from the dreamless ground.

MACHINES

A seed of barley two earth-inches under October
rain;

A laborer's heart drumming slow music for his
sleep through a night;

The lava-core of the earth, fighting hard cold
eating inward from fireless space;

Every hidden hot thing there is,
Lying under flesh, under soil and stone,
Every pulse that clubs stillness,
That beats on desolation,
Has a shrine now wherever a piston-rod
Darts and recoils on a sob of steam,
Wherever a white wheel
Spins.

Is death so strong a word now
That over the earth life shall not be worshiped
In the clarity of steel?

HE

He wears the clean armor of turbines,
And is a quickness in the joints of
machines.

His belly is a belly of fire.

His shoulders are the spread shoulders
of morning.

His heart is remote and mighty as the
first womb-stir in darkness.

And God is an old word, and broken,
for naming him,

And silence is fresh on our lips.

IN AN ENGINE ROOM

Pear branches in silver bud,
Or deep under their swollen-flaked, warm snow,
Are half-remembered, are not more than dreams
here.

This engine is flowering with bright motion,
With pale wheel-flight heaped on stillness.

Here in this place, each morning is a new Spring,
And powered splendor bursting from a sleep
Fires this city forever with April.

CORLISS ENGINE-WHEEL

This is the moving nakedness that swirls once
and is night,
And swirls again and bursts into day;
Here is the same clarity as in the wheel-swung
universe;
The immense and circling travels of the sun,
the stars,
Are woven like this in power and peace;
And all we have, our world, is bare in symbol
here.
If this our ecstasy in watching driven steel
Were less, if this the glory that our handiwork
pours out
Were paler than our foregone dreams, we might
despair;
But, shaped by our hands from the world's
stuff, this wheel
Is like a word our ears have taken from the sky;
And having it, we move with bolder blood,
And go undreaming to our paradise.

WATCHING A CORLISS ENGINE

Only the one that is or anciently is not
Could stare at the dizzy shaft, the flowing wheel
More lidlessly than I.
Only a gaze that burns through time
As the red sun through mist
Could strike to nakedness the pure machine
More certainly than mine.
And, sense-eyed like a tiger or a hawk, I stare
And dream that none on earth
Find splendor with a cleaner sight,
Or finding it, are less betrayed.

TURBINE-ROOM

Peace
Locked in thunders;
Stillness
Like crystal,
Shut in a roaring cube——
Stealing words from the lips,
Impact from movement——
New quiet that cages the blood,
Nirvana
Steam-born.

STARK

Stark as a new-cooled earth
The turbine spins,
Remote.
This son of bloodless splendor
Is awful as a peak
In Tierra del Fuego;
As well it cries
How worlds were whole in matter first,
When no brain drew a sheath
About the ancient, bitter swords
Of their intent.

Stark as a new-cooled earth
The turbine spins,
Remote.

END

As a runner kills his stride,
Piles leaping strength on rigid legs——
The fly-wheel slows
And stops.
Motion shatters on a wall
Of stillness . . . And the earth
Stands broken, torn apart
By dissolution, sudden, ominous.
A black cold eats the heavens.
Planets crumble
At the pinch of hurried fingers;
Death havoccs midnight space
And blows the sky
Empty of powdered worlds.

THE SLEEPERS

Like husbandmen who take the ruddy fruit
And, having gathered it, lie down and sleep,
Men harvest now the perfect strength, the
gleaming power
Of motion splendid in their clear machines,
And never wonder at this whole fertility,
And never stare, till staring frees their eyes, upon
this fruit.
They gather with unknowing hands the flesh of
stars,
The core and fullness of the sun; they harvest
from the secret tree
Whose boughs are wide, whose certain boughs
lift up
The world from ancient roots that buckle
nothingness.
They who might be, to their bounty, blessed
Like men imagined in a tale not yet forgot,
They who might be rich with fruits of paradise,
Are not made happy by their fields, but having
harvested,
Surrender to a sleep.

MACHINES

No wheel turns
But with the petal-building throb of violets;
No steel circle
Moves but in separate hunger, like a heart;
Machine-strength leaps
Like bloom across a field——
Like flesh, as desperate and bright.

PEACE

Take the thunder of turbines deep through your
breast
And be lonely and still as though you watched
under lightnings;
Let their flood rise above you like the dark of
the ocean
And fall on your limbs and drown you in
cleanness;
Let them trample your strength like the low suns
of harvest
And leave you a joy that runs through hot
grainlands;
Let the thunder, the sea and the sun, that are
born of these turbines,
Break you and bring you their peace.

CORLISS ENGINE

As diamonds
Translate and seal
Earth's arrogance within their planes
That leap like bayonets
Beneath the sun,—

So the trampling of oceans,
The labors of soil,
The swift and meaningless designs
Of power scattered through a universe,
Are crystal here—
Are trapped in steel, and held,
Remote and changed and beautiful.

RECIPROCATING ENGINE

The arc of a balance-wheel
Flows like a curved rush of swallows, come over
a hill.
Its thrust is a dream of wet haunches of bullocks
Dragging plows through stiff earth.
Its down-stroke is brilliant with scythes
That have jeweled the hot bosoms of grainlands.

Things lost come again in sudden new beauty.
Look long on an engine. It is sweet to the eyes.

ENGINE ROOM

Not for fruit does the earth labor in its seasons;
Not for light marking the days does the sun burn
Blind in the sky; not for love
Is the full passion freed like lightnings
From flesh to flesh. For nothing but that strength
shall be
Forever strength, that power shall be power
unbroken,
Is there desire in the universe.
Where but in the coiled brain of a man
Is there concern for harvests and loves and the
repeated
Circlings of the sun?
More wisdom is in his hands,
Busy with the desperate steel that hurls
Its time-free rhythm through the blood.

NEW WIND

Wind off the sea,
Lumbering in through the grey, salt morning;
Ancient wind, herding the mountains;
Wind like an old song of harvesters, swung over
grainlands . . .

New wind,
Unbroken,
Like the clean rush from a swept sword
Forever cutting eight feet of air—
Flung from the bright wheel of a Corliss engine,
Steel-born, absolute.

CORLISS ENGINE

The end of wheels is rust——
Red crumbling, though the curved steel sped.

Dissolution
Is yet an outstripped wolf
Pursuing where the hoofs of wonder fly;
Its teeth can no more close
On this wheel's rapture, running free,
Than they can rip
Gold flanks of thunderbolts
Stamped down the sky.

BESIDE A CORLISS ENGINE WHEEL

Because it was drowned in the brazen-red
Color of its climbing, a painted presence
On the wall of that room in space
Which shuts me in,
I was blind to the sun.
Because she was lost
In the warmth of her breasts, as we lay together
In the narrow bed of the day and the night,
I never knew my love.
But now in the one swirl
Of this steel silence, palpable and remote,
I find her beauty and the sun, and hold them,
Flameless and beyond blood,
As in the curving of my hands.

CORLISS ENGINE

Turn, wheel,
Be swift in ordained motion.
My blood stirs
As locked and loyal as your flight.
Pound, rod; repeat
The fertile stroke.
My heart will profit by its warmth
To do the same.
Gleam, shaft and wheel,
Tremble beneath your curves and bars
Of light. The labor in my veins and breast
Wears thus its dream,
Its clearest hope.

WHEEL OF A CORLISS ENGINE

Curve of steel
Lovely as the veins' flowing
In the deep arc of a girl's breast,
Hushed as her breathing, shaken
By loyalties like hers,
Clean swell
Of power naked and lonely
As a pale bosom in the night.

MOTION

Like stone that is drenched and burned and
blown upon
And so made clean,
This wheel is struck to nakedness
By other tides.
Locked fast from the sea and the wind and the
sun,
Its flaring arcs are washed by the swell of time,
And blood-sense whirls and falls against its
steel.
Unconquered, and lonely as rock,
This motion stands as though between a sky
and sea,
The final, bright frontier.

WHEEL-PLAY

Like this we were,
When we were rock:
And when we were fire,
Before our selves were stone:
And when we were naked of burning,
Before we leapt in suns.
Like this we were
When we were motion
Spilling fireward, earthward, bloodward
Out of deeper motion,
Coming from a peace
Outside the sun, the world or any heart.

II.

SKYSCRAPERS, BRIDGES, TRAINS

NEW YORK

Surely no one dreamt this sky-going city,
And no one thought of it in beauty, before it was.

Certain men with their elbows on office tables
And men with their arms shaken by air-drills
And other men with their lime-cracked shoes on
 the rungs of ladders,
Set this city in its place slowly.

And they dreamt,
Between pen-strokes and hods and rivets,
Of warm food for their mouths and women for
 their arms
And soft places for shoulder and thigh
After the days of their labor.

It was well enough they had these visions
And no more;
That from their desires and the cunning of their
 bodies
And the deep clay of Manhattan,
Skyward this city came, as a jonquil comes,
Unbruised with imaginings.

NEW HILLS

In the shadow of skyscrapers, peace.

At the foot of cubed mountains, in the valley of
new hills,

Shadows and peace.

White masses are freed of the earth to bury their
planes in the sky.

Insolent visions in rock drip blue from their
shoulders.

In the valley of skyscrapers, peace

Like a crystal . . .

Slants down from the triumphing stone.

POISED

Like the first mountains poised
Cool and hard
Out of the tossed lava of the world,
The new city stands skyward and is fixed in space
A desperation bred of fire
Into the veins of men
Has hurled itself through iron and rock
And left cleanliness towering.
The young hills of earth without a name
And this pale, stone New York,
Are one beneath the stars;
And time is less than rain.

SKYSCRAPER'S TOP

Clean bricks
Have no curves like a swallow's breast,
Nothing like a wing distorts
Their geometric clay.
Yet, mad as birds that fling
Their swift heart-beats
Into a city's sky,
These tear the blue morning.
They soar
In an angled flock, close-pressed——
Three hundred thousand bricks like swallows
In a wind-locked flight.

NEGRO FOUNDATION GANG

Torsos,
Dark triangles
Looming through sweated jeans,
Poised rigid
Beneath the flash of picks——
Body-muscle of a nation,
Black thaw
At the roots of new sky-lines.

THREE WORKERS

Three workers against the sky
Prod the blue side of the North
With the steel beam
Of a skyscraper.

Three silhouettes drag black legs
Across the brightness.

Now they move slowly up there,
They bend their backs,
Straighten up, and point scorched arms
Against the pale flame.

STRUCTURAL IRON WORKERS

What love do these men give their women
That is like the love they spend
On this iron harlot
With the sky between her breasts?

What kisses
Like the red sting of rivets
Have they left on any lips?

You will not find
The full fruit of their loins
In any daughters, any sons——
But lift your gaze and stare long
Toward the sky's edge.

MORNING

The sun touches the clean tapers of Manhattan
And their thousand flames
Are the one blue fire of the day.
Cool towers shudder into light,
Stone blazes like wax in the still morning.
Something not this city burns and blinds.

AN HOUR

My city bulks darkly under the sunset
And a heaviness has come into her ways.
A swift keenness has passed from her
And she no longer reminds me
Of a white birch when there is no wind.
There is absence in her eyes
That held wonder, changing;
And she waits as though a hand were upon her,
Like a woman with child
Come near her time,

A STREET CLEANER STOPS FOR LUNCH

His fathers had eaten their bread and cheese
In the noon shade of vineyards
And lain, heavy with sun, and stared
At the Italian sky.

His brown fingers
Push bread and cheese and bologna
Into the red, dark warmth
Beyond his lips.

He chews heavily,
With his eyes toward one cloud
Caught on the canyon top
Of the street.

RIDDEN

Skyscrapers stand tethered at evening,
Sinewy, dun.

Against the sunset
They show bloody flanks,
As though fierce riders
Had spurred them all day long.

SKYSCRAPERS: MURKY MORNING

Miners,
Stiff-shouldered, lank and sooty,
Come lumbering up from the pits of night——
Giant laborers
Stare at the sun's red flag of revolt,
Dark-breasted, dumb.

SKYSCRAPERS

No one remembers
Why the straight leap of stone
Should be cool in his breast, like a fountain.
And no one remembers
Why towers of granite that part the blue noon
With flanks of shadow and silver
Should burn through his eyes like a girl's
white body.
Not for any man's knowing, but surely,
The sky-rush of cities wakes festival
Under his heart.

SUSPENSION BRIDGE PIER
UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Tall lily,
Tall red lily
Beside the dark stream,
Lifting your proud stalk
Above a city of sharp, tumbled stones——
Tall lily
Leaning into the twilight,
Delicate, unbreathed on
And strange,
As though a thousand laboring hands
Had never touched you;
As though one hand
Had thrust you, sword-like, trembling
Into the sun.

SUSPENSION BRIDGE AT EVENING

One projected star, the first of night,
Slides pale rays down—
Precision on precision,
Bare.

NIGHT EXPRESS

Twice welcome, disrupter of stillness!
Once for your steel onward leap to assault
the horizon
And again for your rush
That tears clean through a mind's desolation.

Flowing into stillness and night, it is gone;
And the near stars are unshaken again;
The sides of the dark lean together,
And my thought is healed over from the
cleft of this passing
As though I had seen the universe plunge,
terrific in space,
And forgotten it then.

EXPRESS TRAINS

Shaped long and arrowy
For tearing the gusty side of space,
Locomotives leap trembling across the still land.
Like rivers of certainty
That flow past our eyes and speak to our blood,
Locomotives and trains
Swell out of the dawn and dwindle and vanish
 in twilight.
At noon they are fierce as lean gushes of lava,
At night they are eager and lonely as stars.
If anyone look to the earth for his hope,
Or stare toward the rim of the world for peace
 to his heart,
Let him be answered now by the steel flight of
 trains,
Let him be comforted
Beside the paths of their cleanliness.

RAILROAD TRACKS

In the course of a flight
As clear and remote as a world's through the sky,
The bare tracks flow onward in silence
And cut into space like beams thrown ahead of a
star.

The leaping of planets alone in the night,
The movements of men across the dark earth,
Are bound as a train's rush along its steel
pathway.

Here is doom's symbol fixed bright on the ground.

III.
OTHER POEMS

THIS SINGING

I hear my body's song, when I am still,
And the forgotten music of my blood;
And feel rains going down into the loam, when
I breathe,
And roots drawing strength, when my shoulders
are heavy in the grass.
When I walk, a barley-field moves in my limbs;
And when I lift a spade, the sun spouts from my
knuckles.

I have died bitterly to myself
And come into this fullness after desolation.
There was a loosing of my body, before the new
knitting of this birth;
And the quiet of a death, before this singing.

I SPEAK FOR THESE

“I am!” I cry.
The sea and the mountain coast and the sun
Are still.
Because rock is dissolved in my veins
And my sweat is salt with floods
And my whole body burns with a slow fire
Caught from the sun,
I speak for these.
Not mountains now, nor seas, nor suns, are born,
But men and the children of men;
The sea-strength is divided
And the strength of mountains is less
And the sun swings, darkened a little,
For the sake of this cry from within me
And the flower of this dreaming
Lifted from my blood.

HEART

Remember the pure machine,
That brief and dogged thing, your heart.
When fear is windy at your bones,
Or when your lips are wet on lips,
Remember it:
Asking no leave to throb
And, throbbing, still unconcerned
With purposes beyond its stroke.
Remember what it is that drives
You to your grief and joy;
And how it thunders, desolate as waves;
And stirs, remote as south wind, through
your breast.

THE GLORY

A warm music
Breaks in my veins;
A near music drowns
The thunder, the wind
And the silence;
The red carol
Of blood in my body
Is clear; its full song
Is borne through my limbs.
I can stand on a hill
And bend trees to the music
Of this, my wholeness;
I can lie in a meadow, and sleep,
And wake earth to the glory
Of my blood's drum.

ARC

Along the darkened curve
That binds the pale and broken sea
I mark the world's wet edge.
Though at my feet the ocean gnaws
On stone, and quarrels with the land
At this stormed boundary, beyond
There swings a dim line where the flood
Juts clear on space. And as I stand, I feel
Along my body's warm frontier
My blood like waves in battle with the earth;
But where my last horizon breaks
On moon and star across the universe,
There is no turmoil, but an arc-wide peace—
Its center where my heart beats on.

AMERICA UNBORN

May his right hand be like a dynamo
And his blood be like ploughlands ready for
sowing;
His legs be clean as skyscrapers
And his breast whole as a cornfield;
His loins be like wheel-play,
And his heart like the hand-clasp of laborers
At morning and at evening.
May the earth under the dreamless sun
Have conceived such fullness,
As a woman and a man loose a strength from
themselves
When they take one another——
May such a nation be born,
Such a son to labor and be glad,
Such a strong son to toil and find a peace of
his own.

GIVE NOT WITH YOUR HANDS

Give not with your hands; they might break,
lifting mountains.

Give not with your lips, shaping words like
blue swords or lanterns of silver, to fail.

Give with your heart, like earth, the old giver,
Not knowing what life shall come out of its
wholeness,

Thundering the white pear branches of Spring
from its silent dark.

APART

I, the lonely one,
Who watch or shatter with my body's plunge
The living sea, now I am lost
From the clean dark beating with a single stroke
On Portugal and Maine.
I watch the severed curving of a few green miles;
And feel the little of the sea that hollows for my
flesh;
And dream, and tremble in my dream,
Of being limbed, as once I was, with waters
Gripping pole and pole: of having for my own
again
The sea's eye, staring at the sun.

THIS DAY

The world is like an ocean, black with power;
The giant shoulders that we felt beneath
Are swell on swell remote as fire;
The chanting that we heard
Is voiceless water moving terribly——
A storm-quick wilderness that stopped
Our throats with its deep breath.
The darkness ends and we are dumb with sight,
And cannot cry as, blinded, we have cried
Our fear and our desire.

ROCK, BE MY DREAM

Rock, be my dream,
Immense stillness of rock curved under the
land.
Dark stone ripened on the sun-core of the
world,
Be the sphere of my peace.
The flame that fore-ran your deep strength
Has fathered my blood, and built wholeness
within me.
Under the loam of my thought, broken with
passing harvests,
Rock, be my dream, a burning fulfilled.

BEAT SURELY

Beat surely, heart
Within my breast, move clearly as the sun
Whose every circling ends
In wholeness deeper than the sky.
Heart, beat surely, as the land throbs
Once for a summer and abides
The cold until its April comes;
Swell strongly with the seas,
The shafting corn, the clouds,
Whose toil is majesty;
Like these, your beating is a stir
So clear in nothingness
That space and time are but the roaring sound
Where lightning breaks.

STATEMENT

Here is a plane of moon-color, marble under
steady light;
Here a dimmer plane, marble of the color of
feathers
Where the shadow of a grey dove's head
Falls on his breast:
A plane of light, again, a dimmer plane,
again;
Two planes horizontal; and vertical, two;
Two pieces of marble one on the other,
That a chisel has bared in final dimensions
And a wheel has smoothed and made clean—
Two things not quite merging in one
presence,
Becoming, in their nakedness,
And beyond other seeming in the purity of
this,
All presences paired one with another:
A sky over a hill; over a beach, a flood,
A mouth on a mouth.

BODY

Girl-mass
Broken by curves and made swift;
Shoulder-sweep; body's plunge
Of a winter cataract
Piled in slim, hoar silence
On the blaze of hips;
Long, snow-bright spill of thighs
Gleaming downward, swirling
In silver knees of light;
Rain-curves blowing with the wind,
Falling with no shadow, no music,
On the smoothed pools
Of her feet.

NIGHT CLUB

Splendid as the curves
In the hull of a destroyer
Riding the grey chop of the North Atlantic,
A chorus girl's legs
Shear through a night club's confusion.
This is a moment when a ship,
A wind-bare presence of death on the seas,
And a girl of pleasure,
Are to be seen in themselves, remotely existing;
They go unchallengeable, like the stars,
For they have inherited
Symmetry from the fierce loins
That woke the night
To fill it with the seed of fire.

ANCIENT PARADISE

But for minds briefly spent in the deeps of
surrounding wholeness
As stars burn slagward though a night untouched
and immense beyond their leaping:
But for sight defeated on the planes of the world
Like wind against rocks, whirling off from their
stillness:
We might be strong with a peace that is the
blood's lost rhythm of knowing.
Only in the ancient paradise of our blood, in the
dark flow through our veins,
Is the unknown taken and held secure, and the
unseen thing watched with eyeless wonder.

BRAIN

Reagent in the chemistry of the universe,
Brain that is tossed
Deep into the unimagined
Process of time and space—
That exactly and slowly
Precipitates
Flecks of wonder,
Crystals of despair.

THE OLD MAN

Pleasure is not young
Or windy-toed,
But old.

Anyone may overtake him
Plodding down the road
Like Time on a journey.
But there are few will keep his pace
Content to walk in sunlight,
Nor run ahead.

BARE

Pry and lift and turn
The universe like a flat rock, and see
Your hopes and fears
Scurry like beetles in search of other dark;
Pull up the universe like a young tree,
Stare at its roots, regard
The in-crumbled space where it has been;
Bare with your quick hand and quicker eye
The thing the world is,
And with your mind
Lay bare its dreamless clarity.

STARS

The presence of the constellations in the night
Is sweet on my upturned face like a wind;
The nakedness overhead that is stars
Cleanses my eyes like a salt wind and heals
them.

In the morning, when I stare at the bright city
The curves of my eyes will be washed with this
light
That falls arrowy and cool through the deserts of
space.

In the morning the towers and bridges, the stones
and the dust,
Will be whole in new clarity, and space-hung
like stars;
The stirrings of men through the streets will be
poised
As though their flesh were pale worlds, and
oblivion a sky.

RITTENHOUSE SQUARE

Now under the bloodless mood of the high sun
Is flesh burned pure, and become form and motion;
And the sight of this parkful of people
Has the clearness of machinery, laboring and stark.
What were men going their ways through the city,
And children playing and women watching them,
Are contours of matter moving and still
In remote accuracy.
Now a child's running is certain and unquestionable as steel-flight;
And the flow and pause of passersby
Are inevitable in a dreamless pattern.
There is no sorrow or joy in the curving of lips and eyes
And no hope or defeat in the swinging of shoulder and limb,
But only the answering motion
To the burning of the sun and the shrunk fire in the ground.
And this nakedness is beautiful and whole
Like the flowing in a rush of bright wheel-arcs
And the gliding of shaped steel in lonely precision.

